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France: French Empire Until 1789

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industrial laboratories were founded between 1945 and 1955. At the same time, the state made available financial support for university research and put into place specialized research centers such as the Centre de l'Énergie Atomique (Center of Atomic Energy), or CEA. The Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (National Center for Scientific Research), or CNRS, created in 1939, was primarily oriented toward basic research. A highly voluntarist policy was put in place by President Charles de Gaulle starting in 1959, which particularly benefited big state laboratories and large businesses. During the 1970s, an attempt was made to reorient policy toward the needs of the market and to benefit medium-sized businesses. The development of research networks was also a goal, to encourage dialogue between public and private research in an increasingly European context.

Consumers were open to the change. Starting in the 1830s, the increase in income and the development of transport permitted the diffusion of new ways of living. Food products by households became more diverse. Semi-durable products such as cottons, shoes, and household goods, but also newspapers and books, were spread through the whole of society. Thanks to the railway, the taste for travel and leisure conquered all classes of society. The middle-class French person favored expenses devoted to housing and to the education of children, while the worker sacrificed housing expenses in favor of food costs. The use of durable goods such as automobiles, household appliances, and radios spread quickly in the middle classes until 1939 without taking on the character of mass consumption. This stage was quickly left behind after World War II. The French then favored spending on health, transportation, travel, and leisure out of a preference for a lifestyle centered on the home. During the 1970s and 1980s, they welcomed without hesitation the (new) information technologies. But lifestyles became more diverse according to criteria that were not solely based on differences in income.

The development of the French economy thus corresponds to the general pattern of development of the Western economies, notwithstanding a few notable distinctive features. The Revolution and Empire interrupted the take-off of international trade for a long time. The accumulated lag made the integration of France into world trade difficult. Slow population growth explains the slowness with which social change occurred until the 1950s. Agrarian structures long slowed the spread of the agricultural revolution. The slowness of urbanization limited the prospects offered by the domestic market. The economic policies adopted since the end of the nineteenth century were often poorly adapted. On the other hand, a business milieu in constant renewal was always able to find, after long periods of adaptation, new ways to innovate and to specialize

that were adapted to world demand. Consumers were receptive with regard to new products, and often even welcomed them with enthusiasm. Society, despite serious rigidities, was able to change. The profound trauma of World War II makes it possible to understand the speed of later changes and the ease with which they were accepted. At this time, French people experienced a humiliating feeling of decadence and wished to affirm their modernity.

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FRANÇOIS CARON

The French Empire to 1789

To a significant degree, France's early imperial development paralleled that of Great Britain. Wide exploration but failed colonization in the sixteenth-century yielded to more sustained conquest and population growth as the seventeenth century progressed. The eighteenth century

was marked by pronounced economic and demographic growth centered in the Caribbean and North America. The French Empire also had unique characteristics. When at its largest physical size in 1683, it was underdeveloped. Its impressive economic advance thereafter was accompanied by significant territorial reduction. Throughout the entire period, pervasive public disinterest, or even hostility to colonial ventures, reinforced low emigration rates. By 1789, the reduced but flourishing empire was important to sectors of the metropolitan economy yet peripheral to most French people's consciousness.

Repeatedly eclipsed by European affairs, French colonization began fitfully. From the early sixteenth century, some French exploited opportunities in the New World. They supplied textiles and slaves to the Spanish and Portuguese Empires, fished cod off Newfoundland, and bartered for fur on the North American continent—all activities that retained their importance. Yet the appeal of overseas ventures waned when neither bullion mines nor western routes to Asia were discovered, settlement schemes quickly miscarried, and the Wars of Religion (1562–1598) threw France into crisis. Only after 1600 was a territorially based French Empire gradually established. Private commercial initiatives loomed largest, but the desire of the Crown to strengthen the metropolitan economy and to improve France's strategic position, as well as Counter Reformation missionary impulses, also encouraged colonization. At the empire's apogee, France claimed some form of hegemony over vast areas around the globe. Predominantly settler colonies were established in the New World. They embraced a large swath of the North American mainland and nearby islands, stretching from Newfoundland to the Gulf of Mexico. In these colonies, sparse immigrant populations fished, gathered fur, and raised crops on mainly family farms, often in uneasy coexistence with more numerous Native Americans. Settler colonies were also found on a dozen Caribbean islands (e.g., the French Antilles) and Cayenne in South America, where plantations grew tropical crops for export to Europe; Louisiana also had numerous plantations. Entrepôts (*comptoirs*) in West Africa supplied slaves for Caribbean-area plantations. Similar trading posts in India mainly furnished cloth, much of it likewise destined for the slave trade.

The eighteenth-century empire coupled substantial growth—colonial populations more than quadrupled and French trade with its empire grew more rapidly than did that of its chief rival, Great Britain—with the loss of considerable territory. With the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), France surrendered claims to Hudson's Bay, Acadia, and Newfoundland to Great Britain; at the end of the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), France gave up all its remaining continental North American possessions, the smaller West Indian islands, and the African entrepôts

(restored in 1783). In India, dreams of French domination likewise ended in 1763, leaving France with a few trading posts on the subcontinent and, in the Indian Ocean, Île Bourbon (Réunion), Île de France (Mauritius), and the Seychelles, which were way stations that also raised tropical crops for export. In 1789, France retained possessions scattered across the seas, but the rich and dynamic West Indian sugar islands of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Saint Domingue (western Hispaniola) now formed the core of its empire.

Tools of Empire. Mercantilist acts that were intended to foster both economic development and state power regulated much of the French imperial economy—again much like the British. Policies known collectively as the *Exclusif* mandated that all colonial products be sent directly to France on French ships and that colonists use only French goods (also carried solely on French ships), while sharply restricting colonial manufacturing. Frequently, however, these restrictions had to be violated, largely because the supply of necessary goods was recurrently interrupted. Chartered companies, granted trading monopolies for designated geographical areas, were repeatedly established and just as repeatedly failed. Undercapitalized, burdened with high costs and excessive central control and regulation, and outflanked by domestic and foreign interlopers, most companies did little to develop either colonial economies or imperial trade.

Many merchants (supported by some Crown officials) preferred to trade on their own, both within protected colonial markets and as interlopers. These forms of “free trade” were always important in the New World because of the proximity of vast Spanish-American markets and enterprising Dutch and British merchants on neighboring islands. After 1763, authorities sought to calm unrest among Antillean planters and merchants by opening some Caribbean ports to foreign ships, regularizing what had long been common practice. At that time, too, East Indian trade was liberalized. Still, the establishment of new chartered companies for Cayenne (1777) and Senegal (1785) and the revival of the recently abolished East India Company demonstrated the continuing hold of mercantilist approaches among powerful policymakers.

Economic Balance Sheet: France. Its first empire produced mixed results for France's economy. Together with Indian cottons, such “groceries” as sugar, coffee, and tobacco stimulated important processing industries and innovative consumption habits. According to some scholars, these changes promoted a “consumer revolution” in the 1730s and 1740s. Existing manufactures like textiles benefited from a growing—if predominantly enslaved—colonial customer base. And though its effects are hard to distinguish from those of nonimperial commerce and of fishing, colonial trade provided additional stimulus



FRENCH EMPIRE. Slave labor on a Caribbean sugar plantation, seventeenth century. From Jean-Baptiste Duterfe's *Histoire des Antilles*, Paris, 1667, vol. 2, p. 122. (New York Public Library/Art Resource, NY)

to shipbuilding and allied manufacturing, provisioning trades, maritime insurance and related services, and the building of port infrastructure. But just as for Great Britain, the rise of plantation slave colonies in the eighteenth century had the weightiest influence. Colonial trade grew at least twentyfold between 1716 and 1720 and 1784 and 1788, whereas French foreign trade as a whole tripled; by 1789, colonial trade formed a larger proportion of all foreign trade in France than in Great Britain.

Recent research suggests that many areas and industries initially participated in the imperial economy. But from the 1730s, a dynamic, export-oriented, largely Atlantic France pulled ahead of the stagnant, heavily agricultural interior. The empire heightened French regional disparities, even within the dynamic zone. A handful of ports controlled colonial trade; Bordeaux alone accounted for half. Yet their effects were not widely felt. In sharp contrast to Great Britain, the internal market for consumer goods grew slowly in France. So most port areas developed as enclaves focused on specific, usually external, markets, such as northern Europe, the destination of most processed groceries.

Merchants, too, benefited unequally from colonial trade. Slow debt collection and falling prices after trade liberalization in the 1760s increasingly squeezed profits; and by the 1780s, liquidity crises or even bankruptcy threatened many merchants, despite continuing rapid quantitative growth. Though commercial expansion had attracted numerous small firms, the biggest companies, which also often owned shipyards and colonial plantations, increasingly dominated.

Whether because of strong tenurial rights and masked attachment to the land, a generally immobile and backward economy, roadblocks put in the path of religious dissidents, or other factors, French emigration was by far Europe's lowest. In French North America, moreover, less than a third of migrants remained, a much higher rate of return than other European colonies witnessed. Thus the small size of nonslave colonial population and the poverty of the enslaved provided only limited stimulus to French manufacturing. Whereas in Great Britain colonies and metropole developed as complementary markets, French industrial growth depended on exports to Europe. By the

late 1780s, half of French imports came from overseas and half from Europe, but three-fourths of exports went to Europe, with just a quarter going overseas. Ironically, Spanish America, reached either via Spain or directly (often as contraband), formed one of the leading colonial markets for French industrial products, particularly linen and woolen textiles.

Economic Balance Sheet: Colonies. Beginning in the late seventeenth century and accelerating once sugar became king in the 1730s, the Antilles experienced strong growth. Saint Domingue's sugar output grew eightfold in the eighteenth century; by 1780, all French islands' output exceeded that of their British competitors. On the eve of the French Revolution (1789–1799), Saint Domingue alone—source of two-fifths of world sugar production and half the world's coffee, and home to two-thirds of all the slaves in the entire French Empire—accounted for 40 percent of French foreign trade. Population in the French Antilles, half that of the British West Indies in 1700, was larger by 1790, and consumed a large proportion of all French exports, despite an extremely skewed wealth distribution that severely dampened demand among the nearly seven hundred thousand slaves. On balance, the Antilles most closely approximated the mercantilist ideal: producing only primary products, importing all manufactures, and raising only crops not grown in Europe, they had positive effects on the balance of payments and were relatively cheap to defend.

French North America also underwent pronounced growth in the eighteenth century. Population quadrupled, and from the 1730s exports diversified as an increasingly vigorous trade in grain and peas to the Antilles joined traditional furs, fish, and wood. Still, by 1760, on the eve of the British takeover, the seventy thousand or so French colonists represented less than 3 percent of the population of British North America, and they were dispersed over a vast territory suffering from weak economic, political, and military links. The economic base of French North America was also much narrower than that of the thirteen British colonies. Virtually all manufactures were imported; both official and private initiatives to develop cloth weaving, iron foundries, shipyards, and other industries using local raw materials came to grief. They fell victim to high costs, technological inadequacies, and settlers' preference, given relative prices, for arable agriculture. Furs remained the largest export item, accounting for half the value of goods sent to Europe even in the mid-eighteenth century. Gathering and exchanging pelts played a central role in the economies of numerous Native American nations living in areas over which France claimed what was usually a nominal sovereignty. These activities integrated natives into the Atlantic market economy yet also made at least some of them perilously dependent on the production

of one staple. Paradoxically, the fur trade became increasingly marginal to the settler economy, providing only a few hundred jobs for French fur traders, the middlemen between Amerindians and metropolitan merchants, processors, and consumers.

Though few and small, France's Asian and African entrepôts were integral to the imperial economy. French traders sought to obtain a variety of goods from throughout Asia; nevertheless, Indian cottons were always their main item. Exigent West African consumers demanded large quantities of blue cottons. White cottons were taken to France to be finished for reexport. To protect domestic fabrics, their sale was forbidden in the metropole, though fraud made them widely available even before restrictions were eased after the mid-eighteenth century. Since Asian consumers showed little interest in French or other European goods, gold and silver typically made up half or more of all cargoes sent there.

The African slave trade was as vital to the development of the French Antilles plantation economies as to the rest of the European Caribbean. Trade with Africa had, however, only limited effects on France. Its impact was largely confined to French merchants engaged in Asian trade, the source of the textiles that made up at least half of the cargoes used to buy slaves, and to the area around Nantes, far and away the premier slaving port and home to most manufacturers of "Negro cloths," cottons that imitated (poorly, in the eyes of many disdainful African consumers) Asian fabrics. As for the consequences for Africa of trade with France (and the rest of Europe), interpretations have changed. Historians once believed that this trade promoted major changes. Scholars now acknowledge that the production of goods and slaves remained in African hands: Because cloth and metals had long been known in Africa, imports, apart from firearms, neither created much new demand nor displaced existing commodities.

An Empire Suited to France. By 1789, then, the French Empire was considerably smaller than it had been a century earlier, having failed to compensate for the land ceded in North America with significant territorial gains elsewhere. Yet it retained an increasingly rich Caribbean nucleus as well as the African and Indian entrepôts needed to service that core's exigent labor demands. The dramatic growth in Franco-Antilles trade during the eighteenth century suggests that the French policy that had evolved in the face of British military prowess—namely, to hold on to tropical colonies that supplied groceries for processing and reexport to Europe rather than to cling to any and all territory—was well advised, given French capabilities.

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ROBERT S. DUPLESSIS

The French Empire between 1789 and 1950

In 1789, France was on the verge of losing its entire "First Empire." The starting point was the revolt in Santo Domingo (Saint-Domingue), which has been erroneously represented as originating in French-English rivalry exacerbated by the French Revolution. The crisis was triggered by a slave rebellion led by Toussaint Louverture. Although as there were only 15,000 slaves in 1715, by 1789 there were 450,000—in other words, less than one white for twenty blacks. The colonists' only defense had become terror and racism, enslavement based on skin color. The proslavery members of the Constituent Assembly succeeded in maintaining the institution despite Robespierre's strong opposition ("As soon as you utter the word 'slaves' in one of your decrees, you will have pronounced your own dishonor and the undoing of your constitution" [*Archives parlementaires*, vol. 84, 13 May 1791, p. 60]). Under the impact of the rebellion, the Legislative Assembly extended voting rights to all "free persons of color"; the convention briefly abolished slavery two years later (1793), but Napoleon Bonaparte reestablished it in 1802.

The British blockade had cut off relations between France and its empire, temporarily ruining the sugar cane industry to the benefit of sugar beet growers. The Treaty of Vienna in 1815 left France only scattered remnants: Martinique and Guadeloupe in the Caribbean and the ports of Île de Gorée and Saint-Louis in Senegal. The English had abolished the slave trade during their occupation; its resumption was demanded in the name of free trade by the Creoles of Saint-Louis in the "register of grievances" submitted to the Assembly of the Estates General in 1789.

Preoccupied with its Industrial Revolution at home, France did not turn again toward empire until the second half of the century. The conquest of Algeria in 1830 was destined to turn the attention of the French public away from the domestic political problems of the ultraconservative government of King Charles X. Economic interests had a good deal to do with the conflict in Algeria, whose origins went back to the directory: a financial conflict had allowed the dey to demand reimbursement for a grain delivery along with interest on the unpaid amount. The expedition proceeded quickly: France landed five hundred ships with thirty-five thousand men from its expeditionary corps on 14 June 1830, and the dey capitulated on 5 July. The July Monarchy, which came to power at the end of July was undecided on what course to follow with the risky and potentially costly Algerian venture. At first, the monarchy considered an attempt to control the country without annexing it directly, via recognition by the Turkish authorities. But it nearly immediately proved impossible. Ministers temporalized, and the *ad hoc* and self-serving measures of local military commanders decided French policy. Characteristic of these actions was the looting of the treasury, confiscation of the property of expelled authorities, and sequestration of many *habous* (religious endowment property) that provided mosques and schools with independent revenues. The Parliamentary Commission on Africa acknowledged a devastating balance sheet for the operations in 1833 but nevertheless opted for colonization. A revolt organized by Abdelkader began in 1832, and lasted more than fifteen years.

The influence of Marseille merchants was equally decisive in West Africa. In 1843, on the Dahomey coast, the Marseille-based house of Régis gained control of palm oil, valued as the raw material for the burgeoning soap industry and as an industrial lubricant. Libreville was created on the Gabonese coast the same year. The political turning point came in 1851 with the report from the Commission on Trade and Commerce for the African Coasts (Schnapper, 1961). The so-called fulcrum policy was developed by Prime Minister Guizot in Parliament. In 1840, Bugeaud was named governor general of Algeria, and he raised the number of French troops to more than one hundred thousand in 1847—one soldier for every thirty inhabitants.